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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a study of the comparative effectiveness of certain courses in achieving specified educational objectives. Social studies, language arts, vocational/technical, math, science, and fine arts courses were compared as to their effectiveness in achieving "social education." By means of a group concensus of elementary and secondary teachers, common objectives of social education were identified, such as "builds character and good citizenship." The objectives were then arranged in an attitude scale on which teachers could register the degree to which they believed any particular course accomplished those objectives. In the study, 115 teachers responded to the scale six times, once each for the six content areas listed above. The results were compared among the six curricular areas to determine a composite teacher perception of which area was most effective in meeting the objectives of social education. Social studies objectives seemed representative of general education objectives. Objectives for individual curriculum areas did not seem to change from elementary to secondary grades. The strongest relationship existed between science and mathematics objectives. Social studies was ranked among the top third of most useful curriculum areas. (Author/AV)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF K-12 SOCIAL STUDIES OBJECTIVES

by

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It is certainly not news to teachers of Social Studies that other areas of the K-12 curriculum complement or directly meet knowledge, skill, and value objectives which we hold to be the primary business of social education. The degree to which we are effective and the degree to which teachers in other areas perceive themselves as meeting certain objectives we consider our primary task should be of considerable interest, however, to all Social Studies teachers. This study focuses on the objectives of the Social Studies and the degree to which other professionals perceive us as meeting those objectives as compared to their own or yet another curricular area. The results of this investigation signal both a warning and an opportunity. A warning to strengthen our curriculum and strategies to better meet the objectives--and an opportunity for greater cooperative inter-disciplinary teaching to avoid duplication and strengthen professional understanding and effectiveness.

What are the primary purposes of social education K-12? How well do we as Social Studies teachers accomplish these objectives? Do other areas of the curriculum meet these as well or better than we? How do other professional teachers perceive the accomplishment of these objectives? In this study we have attempted to 1) determine common objectives for social education and then 2) submit these objectives to a cross section of practicing elementary and secondary teachers representing most areas of school curricular offerings. Objectives for the reaction form were obtained by asking sixty in-service and pre-service teachers of secondary Social Studies to record their nominations for viable

Social Studies objectives for the seventies.

From this resulting product a list of sixteen objectives for social education was developed and synthesized. This list was then converted to a reaction form (i.e., Objective #2 "Builds character and good citizenship" 5 4 3 2 1 "Does not build character and good citizenship" - circle the most appropriate number on the scale). See Figure 1 (Reaction Form). Thus, each reactor was able to register the degree to which he or she felt the Social Studies program and five others accomplished these objectives.

One hundred fifteen practicing teachers currently enrolled in graduate classes at Florida Technological University and representing ten or more secondary teaching areas as well as elementary teaching were asked to respond "blind" to this sixteen item reaction instrument six times, once each for Language Arts (English), Social Studies, Vocational-Technical, Mathematics, Science, and Fine Arts. The resulting reactions of the respondents could then be compared among the six curricular areas to determine a composite teacher preception as to which area or areas were most effective in meeting objectives.

In addition they were asked to provide information regarding their specialty i.e., elementary or secondary and to rank nine areas of the curriculum (Table V) in order of perceived usefulness to K-12 general education.

Methods

The ratings on the sixteen objectives for each of the six curricular areas were summed and treated as full scale scores. For each scale the means, standard deviations, alpha reliability coefficients and standard errors of measurement were computed. The means for elementary and secondary education were derived and tested for significant

differences (independent group t test). Pearson product moment correlations were computed among the scales for the areas and tested for significance. A random sample of scores for fifty teachers were subjected to smallest space analysis so that a two dimensional plot of the interrelationships among the scales might be inspected. Finally the median rank of the nine curricular areas were computed separately for elementary and secondary teachers.

Insert Figure 1

Results

The overall scale summary data are presented in Table I. It may be observed that the means ranged from a high of 59.5 for Language Arts to a low of 48.8 for Mathematics. The mean for the Social Studies (59.1) was the second highest for the areas--only .3 of a point below Language Arts. Given that the highest obtainable score was 80, however, the obtained overall range of 10.7 indicates little differences in teachers' ratings of the objective among the areas. The reliabilities of the scales were excellent with a high of .92 for Language Arts and a low of .88 for three areas (Fine Arts, Science, Vocational-Technical). The standard

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Insert Table I

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errors of measurement for each scale were correspondingly low ranging from 3.6 to 3.2.

The results of the computation of the means for elementary and secondary education are presented in Table II.

Insert Table II

From the obtained "t" ratios none of the differences were significantly different from zero. Thus it might be concluded, in this sample at least, that elementary and secondary teachers do not differentiate their perceptions of the objectives for the curricular areas.

When one inspects the intercorrelations among the scales (Table III), moderate to low positive relationships may be observed. The high sample correlation (r = .69) was obtained between Science and Math, a relationship generally accepted, while the lowest (r = .31) was found between Mathematics and Fine Arts. Social Studies exhibited the highest correlation with Science (r = .65) and the lowest with Math (r = .44). When the subscale means for a random sample of fifty teachers are translated into interpoint distances in two dimensional space (Table IV), it may be observed that Language Arts and Fine Arts were closest to each other as were Mathematics and Science. The Social Studies although being nearest to Vocational-Technical appear not to cluster but be most centrally

Insert Table III

Insert Table IV

located among the areas. This is verified by its centrality index (38.6) the smallest of all areas studied.

When the median ranks of the nine curricular areas are examined by elementary and secondary, some interesting trends emerge (Table V).

Initially as with the examination of means for the six areas, very few differences are found. Language Arts was afforded the highest rank while Foreign Language was given the lowest priority. The Social Studies emerged third in both cases behind Language Arts and Mathematics.

Insert Table V

Discussion

In the perceptions of all other teachers involved in the study, Social Studies objectives as described by secondary Social Studies teachers seemed representative of general education objectives. Elementary and Secondary teachers didn't horizontally differentiate among the objectives for individual areas nor did they substantially differentiate vertically between the objectives for any of the six curricular areas. This seems to reinforce the possibility the objectives selected as specific to the Social Studies area are, in fact, objectives of general education.

The correlations among the six secondary curricular areas indicate a moderately positive relationship. The strongest relationship emerged between Science and Mathematics. If indeed the preliminary assumption that the objectives described are general education objectives is viable, then it would follow that the strong relationship between Science and Mathematics would emerge. The weakest correlation emerged between Fine Arts and Mathematics. Social Studies related most highly with Science. Again these relationships seem traditionally consistent with commonly accepted perceptions of the areas.

When interrelationships were viewed graphically, the results were generally verified, but one additional phenomena emerged in that Social

Studies, above all areas, appeared most centrally located in the curriculum. This central position seems to reinforce the assumption that the objectives described for Social Studies are in actuality objectives for general education.

Finally the total sample of 115 teachers were asked to rank order nine curricular areas in order of their perceived utility in meeting the objectives. Few differences emerged between secondary and elementary teachers and Social Studies placed within the top third of those perceived to be most useful.

Our data seem to indicate that Social Studies might develop in either of two directions. As indicated earlier, the results could signal both a warning and an opportunity. The Social Studies objectives described can possibly be met in activities of other curricular areas at least in the perceptions or our sample. However, since Social Studies objectives seem to occupy a central position as general education, it follows that the Social Studies are the logical point of origin and catalyst for interdisciplinary coordinations. It seems important, therefore, to reiterate that the opportunity for interdisciplinary cooperation exists within the perceptions of public school teachers.

FIGURE 1

Reaction Form

Circle the most appropriate number on the scale.

1.	Useful in daily living	1 2 3 4 5	Not useful in daily living
2.	Builds character & good citizenship	1 2 3 4 5	Does not build character & citizenship
3.	Important to further schooling	1 2 3 4 5	Not important to further schooling
4.	Aids in developing & clarifying personal values	1 2 3 4 5	Does not aid in developing & clarifying personal values
5.	Develops understanding of career and vocational options	1 2 3 4 5	Does not develop understanding of career & vocational options
6.	Aids in communicating between people	1 2 3 4 5	Does not aid in communicating between people
7.	Important in developing understanding of other cultures	1 2 3 4 5	Is not important in developing understanding of other cultures
8.	Important in developing understanding of own cultural heritage	1 2 3 4 5	Is not important in developing understanding of own cultural heritage
9.	Develops habit of hypothesizing & testing for truth	1 2 3 4 5	Does not develop habit of hypothesizing & testing for truth
10.	Aids in worthy use of leisure time	1 2 3 4 5	Does not aid in worthy use of leisure time
11.	Develops consumer awareness	1 2 3 4 5	Does not develop consumer awareness
12.	Provides opportunity for development of small group skills	1 2 3 4 5	Does not provide opportunity for development of small group skills
13.	Develops skills of investigation	1 2 3 4 5	Does not develop skills of investigation
14.	Broadens aesthetic sense	1 2 3 4 5	Does not broaden aesthetic sense
15.	Develops sense of diversity & inter-relatedness of life on earth	1 2 3 4 5	Does not develop sense of diversity & interrelatedness of life on earth

16.	Broadens understandings of societal institutions	1 2 3 4 5	Does not broaden understandings of societal institutions

TABLE I

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities,
Standard Errors of Measurement for the Summed Objectives
by Curriculum Area*

	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Reliability	Standard Error of Measurement
Fine Arts	57.2	10.2	.88	3.5
Language Arts	59.5	11.9	.92	3.2
Mathematics	48.8	11.3	.91	3.4
Science	54.4	9.9	.88	3.5
Social Studies	59.1	11.0	.91	3.2
Vocational-Technical	50.6	10.2	.88	3.6

*N = 115

TABLE II

Means and Standard Deviations for the Summed Objectives for Elementary and Secondary Teachers*

	Elementary (N = 81)		Secondary (N = 34)		t
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	
Fine Arts	58.3	7.2	57.4	9.3	.51
Language Arts	58.3	10.5	60.7	10.5	1.13
Mathematics	49.2	10.9	49.2	10.1	.03
Science	54.5	8.2	55.0	8.7	.27
Social Studies	60.0	8.5	59.0	10.0	.22
Vocational-Technical	51.7	9.1	50.7	9.1	.32

TABLE III

Correlations Among the Curriculum Areas*
(N = 115)

	FA	LA	Math	Sc	SS	VT
Fine Arts						
Language Arts	55					
Mathematics	31	40				
Science	53	43	69			
Social Studies	55	55	44	65		
Vocational-Technical	48	41	46	47	53	

*Decimals omitted. All correlations statistically different from zero ($P < .05$).

TABLE IV

Two Dimensional Plot of the Curriculum Areas

	Centrality Index	Coordinates	
1. Fine Arts	97.861	74.665	75.814
2. Lanugage Arts	117.003	100.000	-11.592
3. Mathematics	90.062	-69.615	35.675
4. Science	54.395	-52.669	3.211
5. Social Studies	38.688	-39.661	-65.017
6. Vocational-Technical	107.009	-100.000	-100.000

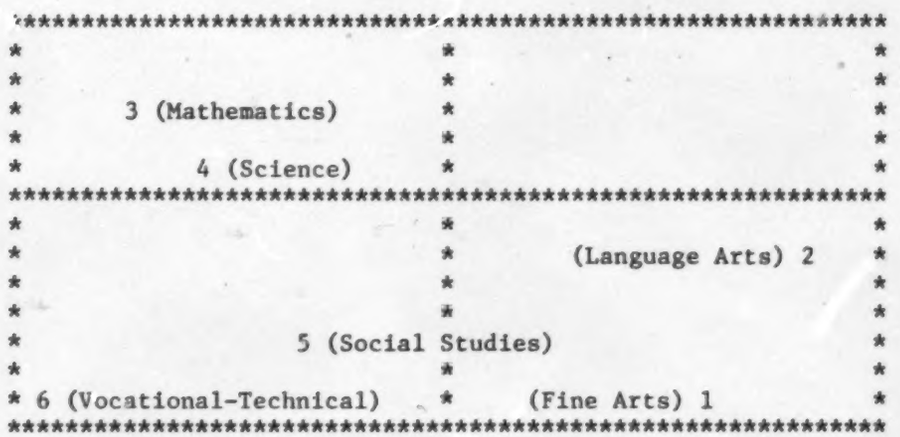

TABLE V

Median Rank of the Curriculum Areas
for Secondary and Elementary Teachers

	Secondary (N = 81)	Elementary (N = 34)
Social Studies	3.8	3.9
Language Arts	1.1	1.0
Foreign Language	8.5	8.8
Science	4.2	4.4
Mathematics	2.5	2.3
Fine Arts	6.1	6.2
Vocational-Technical	5.8	5.5
Physical Education	6.0	5.6
Business	6.9	6.8